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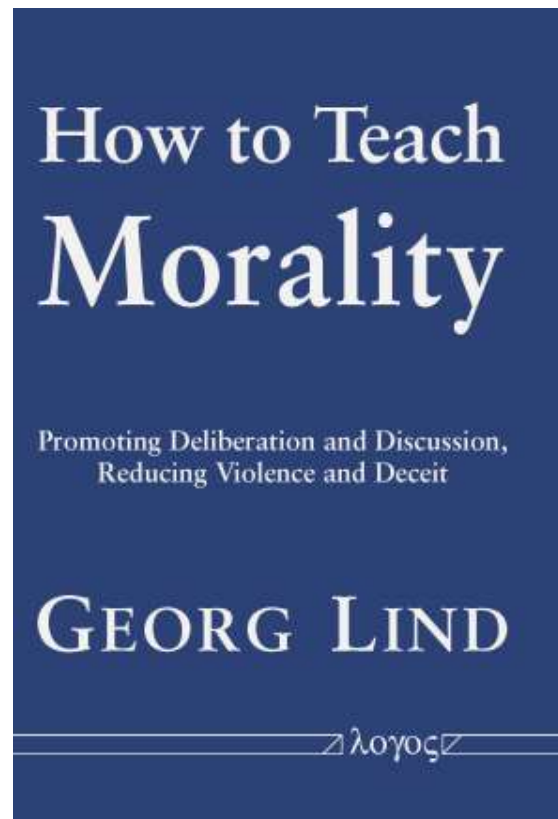
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Do the Right (Dirty, Pretty) Thing! A Review of Georg Lind's *How to Teach Morality*

**Reviewed by William Ayers
University of Illinois at Chicago
United States**

Stephen Frears' masterful 2002 British film, "Dirty Pretty Things," offers a compelling tale of moral reflection and ethics-in-action. Two illegal immigrants—a former doctor from Nigeria named Okwe, who now drives a cab in London during the day and works at the front desk of a hotel at night, and an asylum-seeker named Senay, who is a Turkish Muslim, working at the same hotel as a housekeeper. Each is trying to survive and to live a decent, purposeful life while negotiating the dehumanization and the many risks that mark the subterranean world of modern London. Like other poor immigrants, they do the dirty work for the privileged, and, like others, they remain in large part anonymous and invisible to their overlords. They carry with them the weight of dislocation, the scars of all that they've encountered and endured in their perilous journeys, and they carry, as well, the hope that their uprootedness, their exile, will bear some sweet fruit someday, perhaps in the lives of their children or grandchildren.



When one night a prostitute who works from her room in the hotel summons Okwe to fix a clogged toilet and he pulls a human heart from the mess, a terrible fact is revealed: the hotel manager runs a lucrative illegal enterprise in which immigrants swap their organs for forged passports. Senay, increasingly desperate as the immigration authorities close in on her, makes the agonizing decision to exchange a kidney for a passport. Okwe had resisted using his medical training to participate in this sordid business, but now relents in order to perform the operation on his friend Senay.

The story turns on an impossibly complex set of choices spiraling down from here. Okwe and Senay will be picking from painful alternatives without any guarantees whatsoever—the law will be broken no matter what they each choose, people will be wounded one way or another, and each will be changed in fundamental ways. This is not a simple Column A/Column B kind of ethics: “Abortion... bad.” “Death penalty... good.” “Lying... bad.” Rather this is ethical choice—resistant and absorptive, anguished, unsettling, turbulent, and restless—in the swirl and contradictions of real life as people must actually live it. Their eyes are open and they must choose—there will be no facile or painless answers to their striking predicaments, no easy retreats to the dining room to enjoy the abundant roast beef at the end of the day, safe in the self-absorbed sense of being a good person without doubt or dilemma.

Georg Lind’s latest book, *How to Teach Morality*, is a perfect companion to this film, and an antidote to the popular idea that moral reasoning is the uncomplicated exercise of picking the box marked “good” and rejecting the box marked “bad” in a clean and decontextualized social field of obvious alternatives. For Lind those happy labels could as easily be called “conventional” and “unconventional” because most of us, most of the time act conventionally and assume that we are, in fact, “good” people. In real life moral choices never come in those neat packages. If they did, yes, moral reasoning would be straight-forward and simple (and would not require *reasoning* at all—the compass would be pre-set and operating continuously on automatic pilot), but because they don’t, we are confronted at every turn with dilemmas and choices. And authentic choices are typically characterized by loss as well as gain. The inevitable interconnectedness of modern life, as well as the ideal of democracy as a form of associative living, requires more urgent attention to moral reasoning as an aspect of our humanity, and a disposition to nourish. This means, Lind argues, that educators (and citizens) must become robust participants in shaping a school experience for students in which teaching moral reasoning is the heart of the matter.

Lind makes an important distinction between moral orientation (Do you want to be “good”?) and moral *competence*, that is, the ability to make judgments and then to act on the basis of moral reasoning. We all want to be “good” he contends—it’s part of our human inheritance. But being morally competent, Lind shows, is enhanced and nourished when educators develop propulsive learning opportunities for students to practice and develop. Moral competence can be taught.

Lind draws on decades of practical work with students of all ages and from diverse backgrounds and cultures, people in venues ranging from classrooms and workplaces to prisons and the military. He has pursued and developed his robust research agenda through that sustained practice, and what he offers here is a brief summary of his work, and a refreshing argument that draws on and synthesizes the efforts of philosophers, psychologists, and educators through the ages who have tried to answer the perennial questions concerning the nature of morality and whether it can be taught. Lind builds a solid theoretical base for his work from ancient traditions of moral philosophy and theories of democracy as well as from modern psychologists like Lawrence Kohlberg with whom Lind has a particular relationship and affinity. But the generative core of this book—and what makes it a vital resource for teachers and an important contribution to education in particular—is the second half of the book. Here Lind demonstrates what he calls the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD), an educational method that effectively enhances students’ capacities to grow and develop as intentional moral actors.

KMDD offers participants multiple opportunities to wrestle with moral questions, cope with moral dilemmas through considering opposing views, and put feelings into words. Lind demonstrates that direct instruction in moral principles is distant from building the capacity to think and act in moral terms, and that getting students to “be good” through a regimen of punishments and rewards is a far cry from developing moral reasoning that can be used absent a dominant or domineering authority figure. The dilemmas he provides, and the framework for teachers to produce their own dilemmas for classroom use, are provocative and engaging.

Lind’s work has implications for policy as well as curriculum. He is aligned with a view of education in a democracy as essentially focused on the production, not of things, but of free people capable of developing minds of their own and running their own affairs even as they recognize the importance of learning to live together in association with

others. This puts Lind in opposition to much of the corporate school reform agenda, and particularly the obsession with and overuse of high-stakes standardized tests in schools. For Lind this is a violation of students' (and teachers') rights as well as a threat to democracy because it restricts students' thinking/reflection and leaves too little time or opportunity for the development of moral competence which is essential to active citizenship. He sees as a central goal of education in a democracy as the creation of citizens, not "subjects," and therefore, he views it an educator's responsibility for to focus time and resources and energy on developing students' ability to solve problems and conflicts through thinking and discussion rather than violence, duplicity, and power. In this regard moral competence must be taught.

Schools don't exist outside of history, of course, or culture: they are, rather, at the heart of each—schools serve societies; societies shape schools. School is both mirror and window—it shows us what we value and what we ignore, what is precious and what is venal. Our schools belong to us, they tell us who we are and who we want to be. Authoritarian societies are served by authoritarian schools, just as free schools support free societies. This doesn't mean that authoritarian schools with their propagandistic curriculum, manipulative relationships, and harsh, coercive methods, necessarily produce people who lack skills—both Nazi Germany and medieval Saudi Arabia turned out brilliant doctors and scientists. Nor does it mean that they are universally successful—they produce their share of rebels and resisters for sure, and simply because they are totalitarian doesn't mean that they are totally effective. Still, in authoritarian schools the entire system is twisted toward mystification and geared toward control. If you know that a given society is fascist—Germany in the 1930s, say—certain classroom characteristics are entirely predictable. You assume the tone will be authoritative, the pedagogy domineering, the curriculum manipulative even before you take a first step into school, and you'll often enough be right. Conversely, if you visit a school and see these same qualities, you might confidently predict that the larger society is hierarchical and imperious, even if it wraps itself in high and noble phrases: the Fatherland, the People, Patriotism, even Freedom.

Social strengths—confidence, optimism, fellow-feeling and moral reasoning in one place—as well as weaknesses—pessimism, fear, mindless conformity in another—are reflected in society's schools. Inequities are on display, as are hopes and aspirations. This in part explains why schools from South Africa to China to Chile to the United States are sites of struggles for what people believe could be a better world.

Education is always enacted within a community or a society, and schooling always involves ushering the young into some social order or other, into an entire universe. Educators, then, must keep their eyes open: what is the existing social order? How do we warrant, defend, or justify the world as it is? What do we oppose or resist? What alternatives are possible? What are we teaching for? Schools are set up to induct the young, and so, whatever else they do, they enact partial answers to humanity's enduring questions: What does it mean to be human? What is society for? What is the meaning of life and what is "the good life"? What do we owe one another? What can we hope for?

From the perspective of a humane or democratic society the authoritarian approach is always backwards, always wrong—it undermines the participatory spirit of democratic living, it disrupts community, it aims to destroy independent and critical thought, and it undermines moral reasoning. A functioning, vital democracy requires, in the first place, participation, some tolerance and acceptance of difference, some independent thought, some spirit of mutuality—a sense that we are all in this boat together, and that we'd better start rowing. Democracy demands active, ethical, thinking human beings—we ordinary people, after all, are the sovereign, expected to make the big decisions that affect our lives—and education is designed to empower and to enable that goal.

Moral reasoning and ethics are daunting texts any way you look at it—the principles of right and wrong, a discipline dealing with good and evil, a branch of philosophy stretching back to antiquity, a manual for right living, and on and on—ethics intimidates. But Georg Lind brings it down to earth and offers tools to make moral reasoning accessible and useful.

Moreover, to presume to talk of ethics isn't just abstract, high-minded, and dense, it also implies a rectitude nobody can sustain and very few—certainly not me—want even to aspire to. It gestures, then, toward self-righteousness. Is my life so damned exemplary? Am I in any position to pronounce moralizing judgments, to strike an authoritative pose, to condescend and to scold? Am I really so good? Ethics terrorizes. And once again, Georg Lind takes away the fear.

Ethics edges as well toward the religious and the political, where it is hotly declaimed and jealously guarded. Sermons on right living are the purview of preachers and, increasingly, of politicians, most often in the form of one-liners for easy listening. We feel our eyes getting heavy, our brains being packed up with cotton wool—ethics anesthetizes. But not for Georg Lind—he wakes us up.

Teachers must confront the intimidation if they are to resist successfully the reduction of teaching to the instrumental, the merely serviceable, which commands so much easy attention. For at the base of teaching, at its most fundamental, profound, and primitive core, all teaching is indeed ethical work. Teachers, whether they know it or not, are moral actors, and teaching always demands moral commitment and ethical action. Moral reasoning is necessary.

Moral reasoning involves choosing between possible alternatives. A student approaches his philosophy professor during the German occupation of Paris for advice about a decision he is wrestling with—Should I, he asks, stay at home to care for my aged and ill mother, or should I redeem the family honor in light of my collaborationist father by joining the Resistance to Nazi occupation? He is forced into an ethical choice simply because he sees the alternatives and can't turn away. After carefully listening to the reasoning of his student, the professor says: You must decide for yourself. This, of course, feels dreadful—nothing is as clear or clean or absolutely certain as he would like. Frustrated and in urgent pursuit of higher authority, the student angrily denounces his professor and says that if the philosopher can't help him, he'll go to a priest for advice. Very well, replies the professor, and which priest will you choose? The student is being told that there is no higher authority—he will be fully and finally responsible for his decision, without the benefit of blaming or crediting someone else. The student can object and insist and curse his mentor and his predicament, but in the end he will make up his own mind, and with that choice he will dive into the wreckage with all the good and terrible consequences to follow. Choosing his priest is still choosing, even if it appears noncommittal and neutral. Education in moral reasoning would not solve the dilemma for him so much as illuminate it.

What is right and wrong? What is good and bad? What should I do in this or that situation? What are people for? What is my obligation to others? This is Georg Lind's territory: questions that can organize our thinking as we provide dilemmas and problems for our students.

The moral questions that arise are different in kind from factual questions. A factual question might be, Where is P.S. 87? Or how many kids below the poverty line attend P.S. 87? Moral questions are different: Should the school board spend funds on security or the arts? Or should the board invest in a program explicitly to benefit the poor children at P.S. 87? Those questions cannot be settled by simply referring to evidence. They require awareness, judgment, practice, and choice. Similarly, in a class you might ask, Is Sydney here? A different order of question is, What is Sydney's experience,

what does she think and what does she require? In whatever guise, the classroom is a site where moral questions live—whether brought to consciousness or not—because of the implicit and explicit concerns that propel people to gather there. Georg Lind is asking us to intentionally center classroom life here.

These are, of course, ethical questions, and teachers—while they may be guided by some universal code or abstract form—soon realize that classroom ethics is a down-to-earth, practical affair worked out on the ground by ordinary people. Universals can certainly help—Love Your Neighbor; Don't Lie or Steal—because universal principles invite us to clean up our acts and to turn away from compromise, cowardice, blindness. Universals can act as our sign posts, even though they can't settle each and every particular as it emerges.

Nourishing a stronger moral imagination—How does the other person feel?—is also a good idea. But neither universal principle nor vivid imagination is sufficient to settle every possible issue for all time, for moral decision-making always involves fundamental choices in which no system or rule or guru can ever fully deliver the answer. Nothing and no one can be made into the Court of Last Resort. Because we are free, our moral reasoning requires that we at least try to see the bigger picture, that we struggle toward wide-awakeness and always new awarenesses, and still our ethical decisions are lonely, often intuitive, filled with despair and, finally, courage.


The Chinese ideogram for person depicts a figure grounded in the earth and stretching toward heaven. What is she reaching for? What dream is she pursuing? Why so seemingly becalmed on one end, and yet simultaneously so relentlessly restless on the other? The character suggests the destiny of every human being: To be fated, but also to be free; to be both free and fated. Each of us is planted in the mud and the muck of daily existence, thrust into a world not of our choosing, and tethered then to hard-rock reality; each of us is also endowed with a mind able to reflect on that reality, to choose who to be in light of the cold facts and the merely given. We each have a moral orientation, and can each develop a rich capacity for moral reasoning.

Teachers toil in the common fields, while we hold open the possibility of something more, something transcendent—enlightenment, certainly, and liberation. Each morning, as we rise and venture toward a new day, and, later, as we approach our classrooms, we might remind ourselves that a teacher's destination is always the same: that special spot between heaven and earth, that plain but spectacular space where we might once again try to teach toward full participation, toward freedom, and toward moral competence.

About the Reviewer

William Ayres, formerly Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior University Scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) has written extensively about social justice, participatory democracy, and teaching as an essentially intellectual, ethical, and political enterprise. His books include *Teaching toward Freedom*; *Fugitive Days: A Memoir. Public Enemy: Confessions of an American Dissident*; *To Teach: The Journey, in Comics*; *Race Course: Against White Supremacy*; and *Demand the Impossible: A Radical Manifesto*.



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